

## Chapter II

# Conflicts and Communities: A Northeast Indian Perspective

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INDIA'S NORTHEASTERN region has been a conflict-ridden area. The most important form of conflict besetting the reality of this area is the one associated with, what is called in northeast India (NEI), extremist politics. Such politics, characterized by unconstitutional, and very often, violent methods, began in modern India, immediately after the British colonial rule came to an end in the middle of the twentieth century and when a section of the Nagas refused to join the newly formed republic. The Naga extremist politics set a trend, which today creates an almost insurmountable problem in India's Northeast. Almost each small community with some noticeable cultural markers, imagined or real, is asking for separate political identities and special privileges leading to conflicts of unprecedented proportions. The problems created by such conflicts have been so serious that even constant deployment of security forces in the region has not been able to maintain peace in the region. Efforts at suppression, reconciliation through concessions, and attempts at integration through various means, are on but inter community conflicts are only on the increase. On the one hand, a large number of politicians, policy makers and intellectuals in India and also abroad have been declaring repeatedly that without solving the problem of extremist violence the efforts at development cannot yield results. On the other a strong, informed and authoritative opinion exists that unequal treatment, neglect and failure of developmental strategy gave birth to extremism. The report of the High Level Commission headed by S. P. Shukla clearly reflects this when it says,

It would be simplistic to believe that development by itself can end insurgency and restore tranquility. Yet it constitutes a most important element in that task and an effective entry point for dealing with complex problems of historical neglect, rapid transition and social change. The extraordinary ethno-geographic and bio-geographic diversity of the region precludes uniform solutions as different communities are at varying stages of growth.<sup>1</sup>

Whatever are our diagnoses and prescriptions it is obvious that the seriousness of the problem be recognized. But today when we look at this violence, another disturbing aspect stares at us. The extremist politics of this kind is becoming increasingly ethno-centric in this area. Almost all extremist outfits claim to represent the interest of their respective communities.<sup>2</sup> A look at the news headlines over even a month convinces one that every community or groups of North East India today have extremist groups of their own. More importantly, ethnic conflict is no longer limited to insurgent groups. Politics of this area is today infested with ethnocentric propensities. Not to speak of political parties and their organizations even the non-party students and youth organizations of the region today are organized mainly on ethnic or "communal" lines.<sup>3</sup> As a result, this region is now infamous for inter-community conflicts leading to violence seriously affecting everyday life.<sup>4</sup> Inter-community hatred, conflicts and violence in the region could be understood only if we understand the forces which generate such conflicts, the interest of such forces pursue and also the social values they propagate. While trying to understand inter-community conflict and its impact on the civil life of Shillong, the capital city of the northeast Indian hill state Meghalaya, we have argued that the parochialism and the xenophobia we notice in most parts of the North East are obviously the results of conflicts over land, job opportunities and questions of cultural identities. And that in most cases the question of cultural identity has become a means of mass mobilization for the dominant sections of the relatively backward sections to pursue their sectarian interests.<sup>5</sup>

Contemporary social science literature in India has been using the term community in a very loose manner referring to caste, religious and linguistic communities, tribes<sup>6</sup> and nationalities. One of the best known efforts in describing the various communities in the country was made in the People of India Project. In the report of this project some problems of identifying communities in India have been discussed but even this ambitious project could not decide upon a clear meaning of the term. It appears to have accepted those groups as communities who figured in earlier Government lists and reports of ethnographers. And these lists have no pretensions of conceptual clarity. To understand the multi-

cultural and poly-ethnic northeast India it is necessary to have a clear idea about whom we refer to when we use terms like community and ethnic groups. In a section on conceptual framework and methodology after having discussed some of the problems involved in conceptualization K. S. Singh says, "The communities generally identify themselves as such and are identified as such by others in terms of occupation, endogamy, identity, etc."<sup>7</sup> There is no doubt that by the term community this project therefore meant something similar to 'ethnic' group. According to the estimates made in that project North-East India, comprising the states of Assam, Manipur, Tripura, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim, has three hundred eighty two culturally and locationally distinct communities of various sizes and at various stages of development. This estimate does overlook a large number of groups of people with distinct cultural markers. But the important point to note is that many of these culturally distinct groups have acquired communal<sup>8</sup> identities, which govern their perception of the socio-political reality. The leaders of such communities have begun to identify values and interests which appear to be universal to their respective communities. The articulation of such interests has generated a lot of tensions because such interests of a community often come into conflict with interests of other communities. Though there are ritualistic statements, at almost regular intervals, by public leaders of these communities about inter-community harmony and cooperation and concerted political moves by some very articulate sections at projecting what is often called a regional identity of North-East India, the prevailing tensions cannot escape the eyes of any perceptive observer, particularly in the face of the strong ethnic movements that pervade the political reality of the region.

The movements of the various communities to assert and protect their, what is commonly called 'ethnic' identity, are the most significant aspects of the contemporary socio-political reality of India's North East. The movements launched by the *Asomiyas*, the *Bengalis*, the *Nagas*, the *Kukis*, the *Khasis*, the *Garos*, the *Mizos*, the *Bodos*, the *Karbis*, the *Kokboroks*, are now well known. Many smaller groups with somewhat blurred cultural markers are also now beginning to assert their identities. Some are even busy in inventing separate identities.<sup>9</sup> At times such assertions emerge as a result of political strategies for national and state level elections.<sup>10</sup>

The term ethnic is commonly used in North East to refer to groups of people with distinct cultural characteristics. At a later stage we discuss the problems of this usage. Some of these movements are making separatist demands and others are articulating issues that are apparently cultural, but politically ticklish. The developments in areas like the

Eastern Europe, the constituents of the erstwhile Soviet Union, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and large parts of Africa bear irrefutable evidence of the fact that 'ethnic' polarization and attendant conflicts have become a world wide phenomenon. A very striking example of enduring importance of ethnic identity even in *post-modern times* is to be found in the city of New York where one would have expected the various communities to melt into the pot of American culture.<sup>11</sup> Ethnicity has been found to be important for politics and culture of that city. In a penetrating study of the Negroes, Puertoricans, Jews, Italians and Irish of the city Glazier and Moynihan conclude that ethnicity was more than an influence on events; it was commonly the source of events. Social and political institutions did not merely respond to ethnic interests; a great number of institutions existed for the specific purpose of serving ethnic interests. This in turn tended to perpetuate them. In many ways, the atmosphere of New York City was found hospitable to ethnic groupings: it recognized them, and to that extent encouraged them.<sup>12</sup>

If in one of the most advanced cities of an industrialized country, with liberal individualist values being central to their political culture, ethnicity can remain so important it is only natural that in societies with considerable primordial loyalties or non-liberal values it will govern the minds of large majorities. Articulation of grievances and mobilization of peoples on ethnic lines have acquired such proportions that ethno-nationalism has become almost an ideology. In its contemporary sense ethnicity is a modern phenomenon. Ethnicity has come to acquire its current importance only in the context of the Project of Nation-state building, which emphasizes the homogeneity of the politico-cultural entity called 'nation'. It is necessary to remember that though the term nation has been in use from antiquity, yet in the distant past it meant only a race and only from early 19th century this term began to be used to mean a whole people of a country.<sup>13</sup> When states came to be organized in national terms, the national communities were contrasted with other groups within the states, who had cultural traits that distinguished them from the mainstream. These cultural groups are often identified as *ethnic communities or groups* and their projects perceived as *ethno-nationalistic*. The phenomenon of ethnicity can therefore be understood only in the context of the multi-cultural civic societies and the existence of small groups with, what Naroll calls, "a predominantly archaic character"<sup>14</sup> within them.

In the Indian context ethnicity not only remains an important part of the reality but it also happens to be the source of a series of major problems faced by the Indian State. Many 'insurgent' situations, separatist demands articulated in terms of autonomy, controversies over linguistic and religious issues are rooted in failure of the state to fulfil

aspirations of the competing ethnic communities.<sup>15</sup> The ethnic map of India is complex and the hackneyed phrase 'unity in diversity' does not really represent the ethnic heterogeneity of the country. The history of the Indian nation-state is a history of integration of diverse ethnic groups through various methods of assimilation. As Maya Chadda rightly says, in a different context though, "From the very start, India has been pre-occupied with finding ways of accommodating ethno-nationalism within the framework of a modern state."<sup>16</sup> The existence of various ethno-cultural geographical personalities in India is so prominent that it is rather difficult to think of India as a nation in the cultural sense, unless one is a mainstream chauvinist. One scholar had argued that India had distinct ethnic minorities in scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, Jains, Jews, Sikhs, Muslims, Christians, Anglo Indians, Parsees and Chinese.<sup>17</sup> This perspective of course ignores the existence of the innumerable geo-cultural personalities.<sup>18</sup>

We have argued elsewhere that because of the fact that the mainstream Indian nationalists accept a state centred definition of nationalism and contextualize this nationalism in terms of a Hindi-Hindu-Brahminical tradition, the communities not belonging to this tradition fail to identify with the Indian state-centred nationalism. Some of these smaller communities are nationalities in their own rights and others are ethnic groups with nationality potentialities.<sup>19</sup> Even a cursory look at the history of nationality formation in the world convinces one of a point succinctly made by Paul Brass, that this process involves passing through three stages. The first stage is of ethnicity, implying an existence of cultural markers recognized easily but their political significance is unnoticed. The second is of community awareness, implying evolution of political consciousness of cultural identity and the urge to employ it for furthering community interests. And the third is of nationality formation involving right to self-determination.<sup>20</sup>

In this sense many so called ethnic groups of North-East India have already crossed the stage of ethnicity and have entered the stage of community awareness and others have entered the stage of nationality formation. Peoples like the *Asomiyas*, the *Bengalies*, the *Khasis*, the *Bodos*, *Mizos*, *Nagas*, and recently even the *Karbis* appear to have become nationalities demanding the political right to control their own affairs.<sup>21</sup> Only sections of the *Nagas*, *Mizos* and the *Asomiyas* are demanding secession from the state of India, and even among these communities large majorities exist which accept the reality of the Indian state and the benefits associated with this arrangement. The insurgent movements of the most advanced communities of the region can be called *bargaining insurgencies* because insurgent sections do talk of arriving at negotiated settlements. But in these communities nationality

consciousness exists and their urge to self-determination is reflected in the articulation of demands which amount to demands for homelands, though within the state of India.<sup>22</sup> Others like the *Mishing*, the *Koches*, various tribes in Tripura, Nagaland and many others are at the stage of community awareness. Some small tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, the *Jaintia* of Meghalaya and a whole range of small groups are today aware of their ethnic identities. In this connection it is important to note that except the Asomiyas and the Bengalis, in all other communities of the region the most dominant sections are the newly emerging educated elites. The Asomiyas and the Bengalis now have middle classes and nascent regional bourgeois in their communities.

The indigenous communities are in stages of development in which bourgeoisie have not emerged as yet. The working classes are unorganized and connected to agriculture. In the hill areas shifting cultivation is common even today. In this situation the educated elites of the indigenous communities and the educated middle class plays a crucial role. These elites are gradually learning to make use of their ethnic identity to pursue their own interests, which they project as the interests of the community. Since they do not have solid base of capital to help them exercise hegemony they exploit the emotive cultural slogans and ethnic issues for the purpose of establishing hegemony in their respective communities. Some of these groups accept the identities of the larger communities in their geographical location and cultural milieu but their elites assert two different sets of identities and also seek to protect two different kinds of interests. The smaller cultural identities are asserted to further some goals at the smaller community level. In Nagaland, for instance, when the Semas (Simus) or the Aos talk of protecting their identity, it is not that they totally deny their Naga identity, which is a larger identity. The elites of the Semas and the Aos actually articulate their ethnic identity to protect some interests within a sphere in which they need to compete with other Naga tribes. But the same elites as parts of the larger Naga identity will assert their identity as Nagas when they have to compete with other larger communities like the Assamese, and the Bengalis, or seek to derive benefits from the state of India on a preferential basis.<sup>23</sup> The articulation of interests at these two levels is also connected with two different levels of consciousness. These elites being, as they are, a part of the Indian state and deriving advantages from it also identify with the Indian community when it suits their interests. What Amalendu Guha called the little nationalism have now acquired another level.<sup>24</sup> The relatively larger communities of Northeast India have acquired nationality consciousness. Except very small ethnic groups, all groups of people with distinct cultural markers are in the process of acquiring community consciousness. Articulation of interests by the

dominant sections of each of these communities and the ethnic groups is generating the contemporary tensions in the region, because in a situation of scarcity of opportunities the interests of the elites or dominant sections of individual communities come in serious conflicts with those of the other communities. These interests are being manifested in secessionist demands, demands of homelands, attempts at ethnic cleansing and also reorganization of the administrative structures. These tensions and conflicts are generally referred to as ethnic conflicts in North East India.

## II

In spite of the inroads made by the market forces and the values associated with liberal democratic politics, India's north-eastern region, populated by communities with strong primordial values, emanating from their tribal and in some cases semi-feudal bases, have been experiencing ethnic assertions for quite some time now. A major part of this region was organized by the British under a composite state, named after the erstwhile Ahom kingdom of Asom, called Assam by the British. Social scientists, journalists and political activists of various ideological dispositions have often tried to explain the ethnic assertions, the attendant political turmoil and the consequent administrative reorganization, often called the dismemberment of the composite state of Assam, in terms of the expansionist tendencies of the most advanced section of the populace of the region, the *Asomiya* middle class. The All Party Hill Leaders Conference, for instance, categorically stated that the Assam Official Language Act was responsible for dismemberment of Assam.<sup>25</sup> It is true that a section of the *Asomiya* middle class have been nurturing expansionist tendencies.<sup>26</sup> But this view ignores the fact that ethnic (community) assertions manifest themselves only when social forces requiring such manifestations emerge or dominant sections come to acquire values conducive to such assertions. It is not difficult to see that even without the adoption of Assamese as the official language the Geo-cultural personalities which were not aware of their ethnic identities would have asserted themselves when they arrived at the relevant stage of social developments, particularly in a situation of underdevelopment and scarcity.<sup>27</sup>

The first stirrings of ethnic assertions in the region began in Assam when a section of the elites of the Ahoms, whose Kings ruled and integrated a major part of this area to give shape to Asom in the pre-British period, organized the All Assam Ahom Association to fight against the "injustices" done to the community by the British.<sup>28</sup> This was followed by other organizations articulating ethnic interests of various communities. The process of ethnic formation has been very complicated

in the entire area because communities inhabiting this geographically diverse area have been experiencing uneven levels of material development and therefore experiencing various levels of consciousness. The elite of the materially advanced communities often exercise or at least aspire to exercise hegemony in the entire region and, of course, within their own communities. Elsewhere we have discussed this process with particular reference to some communities in Assam.<sup>29</sup> *In this connection it is necessary to keep in mind that the concept of hegemony cannot be used to analyse the situation of these ethnic conflicts in the orthodox Gramscian sense. It needs to be modified to become a useful tool of analysis for the relevant social reality.* Manorama Sharma took up this exercise in her study of the Assamese Middle class.<sup>30</sup> We have ourselves suggested that to reflect the process of organizing intellectual and moral leadership, not in the sphere of body politic but in the sphere of community specific civil societies of North-East India, the Gramscian concept should be modified. Such an approach should be able to locate the sources of ethnic conflicts of the region for arriving at long-term solutions.

The process of proliferation of ethnic movements is so rapid and continuous in this region that it is really difficult to find parallels in human history. These movements are threatening to destabilize the existing social and political arrangements leading to serious inter-community conflicts. Many of these are taking recourse to extra-constitutional methods and in certain well known cases, like those of the *Asoniyas, Nagas, Mizos, Kokboroks, Khasis, Garos, Bodos* and even small communities like the *Hmars*, some sections are resorting to violent means. It is interesting to note that the trend of ethnic articulation has been influencing the reality in such a manner that previously unheard of ethnic identities are emerging in the region. Three Naga tribes, *Chakrii, Keza* and *Sangtang*, got together to form a new tribe, *Chakhesang*.<sup>31</sup> Relatively advanced sections of some backward communities at times create new ethnic identities, apparently articulating the interests of the communities included in the new groups, but actually furthering the interests of the relevant dominant elite. Only recently eighteen organizations of various tribal communities in Tirap area had asked for an autonomous politico-administrative area for themselves.<sup>32</sup>

The cases of tribal communities in Meghalaya and Arunachal present us with a different picture. More than one tribal community come together to ask for a political administrative unit with the avowed objective of protecting the interest of the concerned communities but soon realize that they have conflicting interests. When Meghalaya was formed it was expected that the new state would facilitate the fulfilment of the aspirations of the Khasis, the Garos and the Jaintias. But now after

two decades of the existence of the state a section of the Garos have started arguing that their interests can be protected only if they have a separate Garo state.<sup>33</sup> The small tribes of what is now known as Arunachal appear to have arrived at a holistic identity of Arunachalis in the State created out of the erstwhile NEFA. But here again, the inter-tribal conflicts have started acquiring political dimensions bordering on the demand for self-determination. These problems bother not only the North Eastern states but also the entire country. If the politics and society of North East India is to be understood then the phenomenon of ethnic assertion in the North-East, with extremist propensities, must be examined in its proper perspective and dealt with carefully.

The history of ethnic assertions in this region, now known as North East India, has been closely connected with the history of political evolution, administrative structuring and restructuring, and of course the emergence of new social forces. In the absence of powerful feudal or bourgeois classes, the educated elites of the various communities have come to occupy hegemonic positions in their respective communities and have started competing with the relatively advanced sections of their nearest rival communities for material gains. As we have shown in an analysis of the anti-foreigner movement launched by the All Assam Students' Union in the late seventies and early eighties, very often the elite competitions which successfully mobilize the masses of the relevant communities remain competitions for land, jobs and business opportunities camouflaged in emotive slogans for protection of cultural identities.<sup>34</sup> Similar movements launched by the organizations of other communities of the region are also generated by competitions of same nature.

Since hegemony makes access to these opportunities easy the elites of various communities compete for hegemony too. This competition acquires additional edge from the natural concern of the educated elite for protection and development of cultural identities. It should be remembered that unlike the bourgeoisie the educated elite does not have capital as base of its power. It also does not have the numerical strength of the proletariat. Therefore it has to use emotive issues to establish hegemony. The essential qualifications necessary for successful participation in liberal democratic practices make the educated elite of the ethnic communities the obvious candidates for such hegemony. And therefore competition for hegemony with emotive slogans will remain a source of ethnic conflicts in the area. However, emergence and growth of working classes and generation of resources useful for fulfilling aspirations of educated elite might considerably improve the situation. It is however important to note that since these competing elites aspire to exercise hegemony in their own areas and accept the reality of the Indian

state more of political autonomy and investment will definitely create conditions for containing the challenges to the state of India. Competitions and conflicts would continue till such time as the political aspirations of the elites and the communities mobilized by them remain unfulfilled.

Inter-community conflicts have been bothering the students of Indian politics and society for quite some time.<sup>35</sup> The assertion of identities by various groups of people and their attempts at pursuing, what is often, called community interests have been creating unprecedented complexities for Indian politics and particularly for the Indian State.

Contemporary literature often uses the term community intermittently with other terms like ethnic group, people and nation/nationality. While the term ethnic group frequently refer to a collection of persons occupying an ethnic platform sharing an identity and organized on the basis of some common interest,<sup>36</sup> the people represents large communities with cultural, political ethnographic or geographical commonalities, nation or nationality means groups with strong actual or aspired for right of self determination. The issues raised in the liberal-communitarian controversy,<sup>37</sup> assertion of cultural or ethnic identities<sup>38</sup> by a large number of communities with resultant social conflicts have contributed substantially to this importance. Urmila Phadnis rightly pointed out that in the twentieth century inter-ethnic cleavages, competition, and conflict appeared to have acquired a marked intensity.<sup>39</sup> The communitarian arguments that an individual born in a community acquires moral values from his ties with his community and that the concept of common good constructed in his community is closely connected with the achievement of his individual rights have opened a new dimension of democratic politics of the liberal kind. It appears as if Locke and Rousseau's concepts of community and common good have found a place of pride in political discourses of our times. While the liberal perspective of democracy had focussed on the centrality of the individual and his rights in a competitive entrepreneurial society the concept of the welfare state had diluted this perspective to a considerable extent. This dilution had contributed to the emergence of community as an important political phenomenon.

The question that cannot be avoided is what kind of communities has gained importance? When we look at the situation in contemporary North East India we notice that community is associated with consciousness about comparatively larger community leading to emergence of distinct community identities. But these community identities do not have the nuances of the large identities of the liberal kind, particularly those of the nation. In fact modern political

consciousness seems to accompany community consciousness in North East India or at least the social vehicles of 'modernity' seems to have been carriers of community identities and consciousness in the region. The same social forces also have been active here in spreading the identities of what the western scholarship called the relics of the pre-modern, and also what it called the larger impersonal identities, the hallmark of modernity. In Assam, for instance, organizations like the *Asomiya Bhasa Unnati Sadhini Sabha* and *Sarbojonik Sabha* consolidated the *Asomiya* community and at the same time spread the values that facilitated spread of liberal democratic ideas.<sup>40</sup> In view of this it is important to examine the consequences of emergence of community politics for democracy.

Democracy in the most influential sense of the term has come to refer to the various kinds of liberal governance and political practice. It goes without saying that for such politics the individual and his rights remain central and ideals of liberty and equality are interpreted as freedom to compete with others on equal terms, in pursuit of one's private interests. Private individual rights are crucial to the notion of such politics. Inter-community conflicts adversely affect the rights of the freedom. Contemporary politics of North East India is replete with such interference. In most cases the organizations representing elite or dominant interests of a particular community, specially within the areas identified by such a community as their homeland, are totally intolerant of the efforts of other communities of the area at organizing themselves or expressing their views.<sup>41</sup> While the freedom of expression of an entire community is sought to be suppressed by the dominant sections of the indigenous communities in an organized and visible manner the rights of the individual members of the non-indigenous communities are violated with impunity. Killings of many unfamiliar innocent faces by the volunteers of local *Durbars* in Shillong during August 1998 brought such attitudes to focus.<sup>42</sup> In situations of *inter-community conflicts communities violate rights not only of the members of other communities but in an effort to close the rank of their own communities they trample the individual rights of the members of their own communities*. The Khasi Student's Union, for instance, resents formation of any other student body even by students of indigenous communities of Meghalaya. Other student bodies organized on ethnic or community lines too show similar intolerance. Scanning the local newspapers of some of the states of the NEI would show that even while dealing with criminal activities most communities tend to display a parochial attitude. When members of a particular community are detained by police on suspicion of having perpetrated crimes against members of another community more often than not the criminal's community or at least some of them would protest

at times prevent police from taking action, purely on communal considerations and thus, revealing an ugly dimension of inter-community conflict.

### NOTES

1. *Transforming The Northeast, High Level Commission Report to the Prime Minister*, (Government of India, Planning Commission, New Delhi, March 7, 1997), p.2.
2. This term is being used in various senses in this region, including ethnic groups. We discuss this point in greater details later in this paper.
3. For a detailed Report and analysis of such organizations see, Apurba K. Baruah, *Youth Organizations in North East India*, Report of the ICSSR, NERC, Project on Youth Organizations in North East India, Submitted to NERC, Shillong, 2000. In the North Eastern Hill University, the oldest Central University, all major tribes and linguistic groups of the region have separate student's associations. The University does not officially recognize these but the tacit consent of the authorities to functioning of these organizations is reflected by the fact that university officials grace the celebrations organized by such associations.
4. Number of incidents of ethnic/inter-community violence reflecting inter-community hatred reported in the regional press disturbs the perceptive intellectual opinion of the region in such a manner that in Meghalaya a journalist of Patricia Mukhim's standing had to say that administration even at the top bureaucratic level in the state had been affected by ethnocentrism. See Patricia Mukhim, "Do we want an ethnocentric bureaucracy", *Shillong Times*, Oct. 23, 1998.
5. Apurba K. Baruah, "Engulfing darkness and a possible ray of hope: Understanding tensions in Shillong-I", *Shillong Times*, Oct. 28, 1998.
6. The term tribe has also acquired a peculiar meaning in India. For a discussion see, Asilie Pusa, "Politics in Naga Society, The Inter-tribal Relations", (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, 1996).
7. K.S. Singh, *People of India An Introduction*, (Anthropological Survey of India, Calcutta, 1992), p.42.
8. The term communal is used here to refer to a consciousness, which Bipan Chandra identified in terms of religious communalism. He said, "Simply put communalism is the belief that because a group of people follow a particular religion they have, as a result, common social, political and economic interests." Bipan Chandra, *Communalism in Modern India*, (Vikas, New Delhi, 1984), p.1. The only modification needed in this to understand the contemporary

North-East India is to replace the word religion with cultural or ethnic community.

9. Take for example the *Rabhas* and *Lalungs* of Assam.
10. For an analysis of election strategies of this sort in Assam see, A. K. Baruah, "Assam: Playing Ethnic Politics", *Frontline*, Vol. 13, No.9, May 4-17, 1996.
11. The American culture is generally believed to be a new political and cultural identity emerging from common language, memories, intentions and above all new procedures and institution motivated mainly by the "business of getting and spending, and also of governing and developing". For a discussion see, Clinton Rossiter, *The American Quest 1790-1860* (Scientific Book Agency, Calcutta, 1973). Originally published in 1971 by Mary C Rossiter. See also, R.B. Nye and J.E. Morpurgo, *The Growth of The U.S.A.*, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1964). The mainstream Americans take pride in the 'achievement' of the melting pot.
12. Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot*, (The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, 1976), p.310.
13. For various meanings of this term and its history, see Raymond Williams, *Key words*, (Fontana, Glasgow, 1976), p.178.
14. Raoul Naroll, "On Ethnic Unit Classification", *Current Anthropology*, 5 (October, 1964), cited by Urmila Phadnis in *Ethnicity and Nation-building in South Asia*, (Sage, New Delhi, 1989), p.13.
15. A good collection of articles on the problems related to such realities are to be found in Amrita Basu and Atul Kohli (eds.), *Community Conflicts and the State in India*, (Delhi, OUP, 1998).
16. Maya Chadda, *Ethnicity, Security and Separatism in India*, (OUP, Delhi, 1997), p.6.
17. R.A. Schermerhorn, *Ethnic Plurality in India*, (Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1978.), p.14, cited in Urmila Phadnis, op.cit., p.43.
18. For a discussion on these personalities see, Rashiduddin Khan, *Federal India*, (New Delhi, 1992). See also Nihar Ranjan Ray, *Nationalism in India*, (Aligarh, 1973), pp.28-29.
19. A.K. Baruah, "Middle Class Hegemony and the National Question in Assam", in Milton Sangma (ed.) *Essays on North-East India*, (Indus Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1994), p.247.
20. Paul Brass, "Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison", (Sage, New Delhi, 1991), p.23.
21. For a discussion of some of the issues involved and a description of the emerging community and ethnic assertion see, Girin Phukan and N. L. Dutta (Ed.) *Politics of Identity and Nation Building in Northeast India*, (South Asian Publishers, New Delhi, 1995) particularly, Apurba Kumar Baruah, "Do we need to build a nation?" *Ibid.*, pp.25-34.
22. For a discussion of the politics of the Asomiya militant outfit ULFA, see Samir Das, *ULFA, A Political Analysis* (Delhi, Ajanta

- Publications 1994). Also see, ULFA, 'National question in Assam', in *Symphony of Freedom, papers on nationality question*, (Hyderabad, All India Peoples Resistance Forum, 1996).
23. A typical example of this is found in the inter-tribal relations in contemporary Naga society. For a discussion of this and the tensions arising out of this process see, Asilie Pusa, *Politics in Naga Society – The Inter Triba1 Relations*, Unpublished thesis, (North Eastern Hill University, 1996).
  24. Amalendu Guha, *Planter Raj to Swaraj*, (Peoples Publishing House, New Delhi, 1977), pp.334-337.
  25. See Susmita Sengupta, *Regionalism in Meghalaya*, (South Asian Publishers, New Delhi, 2005).
  26. See, Manorama Sharma, "The Assamese Middle Class and Integration: the Role of Asom Sahitya Sabha", Proceedings of NEIHA, (Shillong 1978).
  27. See A.K. Baruah "Reorganization of the Composite State of Assam and Linguistic Chauvinism of Asomiyas", in NEIHA Proceedings, (Aizawl 1997), pp. 292-296.
  28. See Girin Phukon, *Ethnicisation of Politics in Northeast India* (South Asian Publishers, New Delhi, 2004), pp.122-27.
  29. Apurba K Baruah and Manorama Sharma, "Nationality Question in Assam: Some Conceptual Issues", in Udayon Misra (Ed.) *Nation Building and Development in North East India*, (Purbanchal Prakash, Guwahati, 1991), pp. 14-24.
  30. See, Manorama Sharma, *Social and Economic Change in Assam*, (Ajanta, New Delhi, 1990).
  31. See, Pusa, op.cit.
  32. *Amar Asom*, April 24, 1998.
  33. Refer recent demand of Garo National Council for a separate state.
  34. A.K. Baruah, "Assamese Middle Classes and the Xenophobic Tendencies in Assamese Society", *Frontier*, Vol. 14 No.12, pp.3-6.
  35. For a major effort in understanding such conflicts, see Amrita Basu and Atul Kohli (ed.) *Community Conflicts and State in India*, (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1998).
  36. See, Robert Jackson, "Ethnicity" in Giovanni Sartori (ed.), *Social Science Concepts: A Systemic Analysis* (Sage, New Delhi, 1984), p.208.
  37. For some of the issues raised in this controversy see, Shlomo Avineri and Avner de-Shalit (Des), *Communitarianism and Individual-ism*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992). Also see, Crawford Young, *The Rising Tide of Cultural Pluralism: The Nation State at Bay*, (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1993).
  38. For a discussion on ethnicity see inter alia Urmila Phadnis, *Ethnicity and Nation-building in South Asia*, (New Delhi, Sage Publication, 1989), pp.8-29.
  39. *Ibid.*, p.11.
  40. For a discussion on *Jorhat Sarbojonik Sabha* see, Shrutidev Goswami, "Jorhat Sarbojonik Sabha: Its Role in Socio-Political

Awakening of Assam", Proceedings of North East India History Association, Sixth Session (Agartala, 1985), pp.316-322.

41. While evidence of such intolerance is available in the case of almost all communities of the North East a recent controversy over bandh calls given by an organization called the Non-tribal Youth Union in Meghalaya reflected this reality in a vivid way. See, the debate carried out in the Letters to the Editor Column in *Shillong Time* in August 1998.
42. See Reports in *Shillong Times*, in the last week of August 1998.